[Reynold's Bridge]

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1 Conn. 1938-9 REYNOLD's BRIDGE [(Dunbar)?]

Except for the hard-surfaced road which has replaced the dusty lane of bygone years, the village Reynolds Bridge this afternoon presents to the casual eye the bucolic serenity which must have characterized it half a century ago on any working day. The little white houses are not all well kept, but it is not without the bounds of possibility that they were allowed to fall into decay when occupied by the roistering, happy-go-lucky knifemakers for whom they were built. Peace and quiet lie over the little hamlet. There isn't even a car in sight. On a hillside garden patch in the rear of his home a man is plowing with the aid of a sturdy horse. A housewife is hanging out the wash. Two grubby little boys about five or six years old are busily digging in the dirt by the roadside.

“Look, Mister,” says one of them. “We're buryin' some dead chickies.” He holds up for inspection a bedraggled carcass. The chickies are indisputably dead. Who killed them? “We did,” says the youngster proudly.

Mr. Dunbar, on whim I intend to call, is not at home. Outside the door he has left a little white pad and a pencil, the pad ornamented with the figure of an owl, and the interrogation “Who-o-o?” The owl in palpably home-made, but Mr. Dunbar has been painstaking about it and it is a creditable job.

Down the road a short distance from the neat Dunbar dwelling is an abandoned church, an architectural hodge-podge which it is difficult to associate with any of the religious denominations currently enjoying the support of the villagers. Much water has flowed over the dam since the last congregation filed down the steps one Sunday morning and the

building has suffered at the hands of numberbless small boys. Windows are broken, doors ajar, whole sections of planking along the foundation have been ripped away.

Further down, on the opposite side of the road, is the mustard colored “chapel” 2 where the villagers on Sunday evening gather for services read by the pastor of the Congregational church in Thomaston. Those of other persuasions must attend the churches “up town.”

Past the chapel the road bends sharply to the left, so that a motorist in a fast car would be quite apt to miss entirely, or catch nothing more than a fleeting glimpse of the old knife factory which once hummed with life and occupation but which is now only a ghostly reminder of past prosperity. Down well to the right of the main highway and in a little declivity through which once rushed a rapid stream of water (since diverted) the building is reached by a dirt road several yards long.

It is of wood, presumably white in its heyday, with the exception of a small office brick, now apparently the proud possession of some local club, for it bears above the door upon a gaudily decorated board the single word “Eagles.” As in the old church, windows of the factory have been shattered by stones, and glass fragments lie thick inside and out. The door, upon which is the ironic warning “keep out” swings in the wind with a melancholy creak. The interior, first and second floors, is empty but for a number of work benches which have been left along the walls probably because they were not worth moving. The floor sags dangerously in places, and boards have given away near the elevator shaft. The elevator itself has fallen through the rotten planking and has come to rest precariously and at a drunken angle upon a pipe in the basement.

In the rear of the main building are several smaller ones, obviously warehouses and storerooms. The big iron chimney has toppled over on the roof, and in the cellar scores of bricks have been removed or have fallen from the huge smoke blackened kiln. Wooden beams supporting the largest of the storerooms have buckled, and the roof is sagging.

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A dump behind the sheds is piled high with scrap of several generations of knifemakers; with refuse of the last industry to occupy the factory (an abortive enterprise for the manufacture of tin cans) with cast offs of the present 3 inhabitants of the village; topping it all, inexplicably, the skeleton of a school bus.

The whole place, but for the inconsiderable part taken under the protecting wings of the “Eagles” is suggestive of that creeping rot which overtakes and reduces to essentials in relatively short order, following abandonment, even the proudest works of man. There are no other visitors at the factory this afternoon, a fact not to be wondered at, for the surroundings are hardly conducive to cheerful reflection.

Back on the village road, I stop once more at Mr. Dunbar's house, but find he is still out. On the Watertown road, however, I meet him limping along and we exchange greetings.

“I'll sit down here with you a while,” says Mr. Dunbar, indicating a grassy bank. “I just come on the bus from Waterbury, and my feet hurt. Been out to get my car registered, and I walked all the way from Exchange Place. Didn't realize it was so damn far. “

“Yes, too bad about the old factory. I don't suppose it will ever be used again for anything. I s'pose the Catlin family up in Northfield still owns it. They bought it, you know, and bought most of the houses here along with it. Last thinkg they had in the shop was a metal works. But the machinery wasn't any good, and it wasn't managed very good, and it didn't last. Men was losin' fingers down there every day in the week.

“Knife business'll never come back anyway. If that factory ever does start up again, by some miracle, it won't be knives they make.

“It was the strikes began to ruin the knife business, the way I look at it. Like the one down here. They got callin' each other scabs, and there was a lot of hard feelin' because some went out and some stayed in, and what did it ever get them? They put in drop forges and machine grinders, and got men from other factories, and kept goin' just the same.

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“Then the German knives started comin' into the country and that put the finishin' touches on it. You could got one of those German knives four bladed, pearl handled, for a quarter. Of course the steel was no damn good, and it wouldn't cut anything, but hell, it looked good. In the old days you paid seventy-five cents for even a one - bladed knife that was made here in the village. And a dollar and a quarter and up for the better ones. They made some with silver plated backs.

“Say, there's a story I though of after you'd gone the other day. About Augustus Morse. He used to carry the stuff from the depot and back, lived in this big house of Tibbalses. He brought down a big molasses keg from the station one day, one of them hogsheads. They slid it in the office door all right, but when they filled it up with knives they couldn't get it out again. Had to take the casings off the door. That went to a fella down in St. Louis, that shipment. Simmons Hardware Co., I think it was. The same fella that made the Simmons mattress.

“You were up to see Billy Morehouse, I hear. There isn't an awful lot more I can tell you. I'm no damn good at all on dates and that kind of thing. You want dates, you'll have to get them from somebody else besides me.”